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DE RUEHLM #1456 2491357
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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4196
INFO RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9389
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6286
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4331
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3152
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9909
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3243
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0888
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0344
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2320
RUEHCl/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0239
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6839
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4702
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1320
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001456

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PHUM MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GOVERNMENT HAS CONTROL OF SAMPUR; LULL
IN MILITARY HOSTILITIES

Classified By: CDA JAMES R. MOORE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Sri Lankan media here widely reported Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) statements that its security forces took control of Sampur, the eastern coastal area from which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had launched attacks on the town of Trincomalee, its harbor, and surrounding areas. "There is no victory there, but the government is happy it could neutralize artillery threats to the naval port and other vital economic centers in the east," defense spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella is quoted saying in a September 6 article in the Daily News. Nevertheless, in a September 4 speech at his Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP's) congress to mark the party's 55th anniversary, President Rajapaksa highlighted gaining control of Sampur as a military victory.

¶2. (C) Pro-LTTE website TamilNet reported that GSL forces took over a week to move 3.5km from a neighboring base into Sampur and that the LTTE initially put up strong resistance, but later vacated Sampur town. In a September 6 meeting with the Charge', Defense Secretary (and the President's brother) Gotabaya Rajapaksa said GSL troops were moving cautiously and were taking time to demine the area and sweep for traps in order to secure Sampur fully. The Defense Secretary said the LTTE had initially moved into Sampur, an area not delineated to either the GSL or the LTTE in the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA), in order to gain a strategic advantage. Secretary Rajapaksa said the LTTE always intended to use

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Sampur as a military base of operations, and echoed other government officials who told the media the GSL attack on the area was a defensive posture in order to stop LTTE attacks on neighboring Trincomalee harbor.

¶3. (C) The Defense Secretary also told Charge' that current military operations are at a halt, and said the president intends to have a political solution ready "before he leaves" on September 13 for the Non-Aligned

Movement Summit in Havana and the UN General Assembly in New York. Secretary Rajapaksa spoke of the need to develop the northern Jaffna peninsula economically and provide Tamils a strong incentive to support the government rather than turning to the Tigers.

¶4. (C) Comment: Over the last five weeks of hostilities, there has been much speculation about the fate of Sampur. Now that the government has gained control of the area, fighting there has come to a halt. While the current lull provides a welcome calm for beleaguered civilians, there is still a long distance between a cessation of major hostilities and a return to negotiations. While Defense Secretary Rajapaksa's focus on reaching out to the Tamil civilian population is welcome, his speculation that a "political solution" is imminent in less than a week is highly optimistic. End comment.

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